

**Introduction:**

- A. It's happened thousands of times in big churches and small in every country reached by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Missionaries, ready to depart, bow as the hands of fellow believers are laid upon them and prayers are lifted to God. *“Lord God, we pray for their safety... open doors for the gospel... guide them by your Holy Spirit... meet the needs of this family. And now Lord, we commit them to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* There are hugs and tears and then they're gone. Two years ago we did that here it was for Heidi Ramer traveling to the opposite side of the world—Perth, Australia—to bring the gospel to university students in that very secular city.
- B. Last Sunday we saw the first example of that same practice in the New Testament—in the church in Antioch where Jesus' disciples were first called Christians. **Acts 13:2-3**, *“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”*
- C. Churches send missionaries because Jesus commissioned us to go into all the world to make disciples. We dispatch some of our best people as emissaries of Christ because we want to invest in the spread of the gospel. We give our money to support them and pray for them. And we wait to hear back from them about God's work.
- D. Turn to **Acts 14:21-28**. Paul and Barnabas finally came to the small city of Derbe. After preaching there began to retrace their steps. These few verses capture so well the range of things that missionaries—including *our* missionaries—still do today.

**V.21a...** This had been the response in each of the cities they visited. Clearly God was opening doors and hearts for the gospel.

## I. WE SEND OUR MISSIONARIES TO MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST (14:21a)

Missionaries today see the same kinds of things happen:

- A. Acts 13:6-12 tells how they came to the city of Paphos on Cyprus where they met a Jewish sorcerer who was employed by the governor, Sergius Paulus. When this man wanted to learn about God the sorcerer tried to turn him away. But then Paul, *“filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ‘You are a child of the devil...’*” and God struck the guy blind. The governor *“believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord”* [14:12]. Missionaries make disciples by confronting evil and false teaching so the light of Christ can shine through.

**The world and Satan always oppose the advance of Christ’s gospel.** Part of missionary work is confronting evil and false teaching in the strong name of Jesus Christ. Power encounters like that demonstrate to those seeking God that Jesus is the name above all names. Such work calls for missionaries who are bold and confident in Christ, and who know the work of the devil when they see it.

- B. The rest of Acts 13 tells how Paul preached to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch. His sermon is recorded and it shows how Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament. The climax comes in **13:38-39**, *“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.”* Despite this, many of the Jews rejected the gospel so Paul and Barnabas preached to the Gentiles. **V.48** says, *“they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”* Missionaries make disciples by showing how Jesus completes the Bible’s story.

The Bible is every Christian’s most effective tool for evangelism and it is what all effective missionaries use.

That is why Bible translation and literacy is so important. It is the reason the Gideons give out Bibles so freely. In Pisidian Antioch it wasn't just the Jews who were drawn to Christ through the corridors of the Old Testament; so were Gentiles.

*Illus.:* Years ago I saw a video from New Tribes Mission entitled *Ee-Taow*. It recreated the story of a missionary in Papua New Guinea who gradually unfolded the story of the Bible to the Mouk people. He had the villagers acting it out as he went along. Day by day, he told them about creation, about Abraham and Isaac, Moses and David. Then he told them of Jesus' birth and wonderful life. Then came the day he told of Jesus' death for our sins. The people were devastated and went to their homes deeply saddened. But the next day, he told them the story of Christ's resurrection and the salvation and hope he offers those who believe in him. The people were ecstatic! They began dancing and carried the missionary around on their shoulders! They put their faith in Christ.

- C. In the next cities Paul and Barnabas visited God confirmed the bold message of these missionaries by “enabling them to work signs and wonders” [14:3]. In Lystra they healed a lame man and people thought they were Zeus and Hermes! The local priest of Zeus even tried to offer sacrifices to Paul. **14:14-15:** *“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ‘Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.’”* But again, the crowds turned. **Vv.19b-20:** *“Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.”* I don't know which showed people the power

of God more clearly—healing that lame man or Paul, battered and bloodied, getting up and starting for the next city. However they do it, missionaries make disciples by showing the power of the true and living God. Miracles happen. They really do. But often it is the loving perseverance of missionaries that show lost people the life God gives.

- D. So they came to Derbe, the last stop, where once again “*they preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples.*” The word for *preached* is transliterated *evangelized*. It literally means they *good-newsed* and many believed. That word is all over the place in Acts and throughout the New Testament. It is what Christians do in conversations and songs and sermons—we *good-news*. We tell people how Christ came save us from our sins and give us eternal life. Missionaries don’t always see large numbers come to Christ but they are always carriers of God’s good news. **This is why we send out missionaries—to give lost people the good news of Jesus Christ.**

SUMMARY: This is the work that Heidi does among students in Perth, or that Rutters do in when they offer marriage enrichment groups in France, what Browns do in taking students on wilderness trips, or what Alfors do among Muslim people in Cameroon, and what Swingles began working toward this week in the Middle East. It is an audacious thing to send out missionaries. It is work that often provokes trouble and pain. They go, having no idea just what in the world they’re getting into except that they know they have good news and that they’ve been “*committed to the grace of God*” by the churches sending them.

Then Paul and Barnabas began to retrace their steps back into those hostile places to strengthen the churches they’d established..  
**Vv.21b-22...** To this day...

## II. WE SEND MISSIONARIES TO STRENGTHEN NEWLY WON DISCIPLES (14:21b-22)

Paul and Barnabas had two things on their agenda:

- A. New believers and churches must be encouraged “to remain true to the faith--grounded in Christian doctrine. This is what Paul addressed in every letter we have of his in the New Testament. For example in **1 Cor. 15:1-4** he said, *“Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...”*

If the gospel is to take root in people’s lives we must ground them in the fundamental truths of our faith. In order to endure, these new congregations had to understand the vast grace of God in Christ, the work and gifts of the Holy Spirit, the necessity of godliness and love for one another, the fulfillment of the Old Testament in Christ, our hope of Christ’s return and our eternal life with him.

If a church loses their grip on these cardinal truths they will soon lose their grip on Christ himself. So missionaries are dispatched by the church to vulnerable newer believers and churches to encourage them “to remain true to the faith.” That’s why our seminary professors meet travel far and wide to meet with pastors and students to ground them in Bible truth. For example, Lawson Younger was in China earlier this year teaching pastors the Old Testament.

- B. New believers and churches must also be encouraged “to persevere through many hardships.” Christians are never far from trouble and there is no church that will not have to endure tribulations, disruptions, wolves from within and enemies from without. Not all who profess Christ remain true to him. So it is essential that new believers and churches learn that *“we must go through many hardships to*

*enter the kingdom of God.*” These believers remembered, of course, the public outcries, the fierce opposition, and the stoning. They knew that anyone who follows Christ carries a cross like he did. But believers need help to learn *how* to persevere, how to lay hold of their faith, how to draw upon God’s Word, the life of Christ within them, and the hope that sustains us. So the Lord sends them strong missionary encouragers.

**V.23...** To our knowledge none of those newly appointed elders had even been Christians more than a year or two, at the most. These weren’t guys with years of experience on boards or in preaching. No wonder Paul and Barnabas had the churches join them in prayer and fastings (the word is plural) as the selections were made! In many different ways, this is still the work of some missionaries:

### **III. WE SEND MISSIONARIES TO ESTABLISH CHURCH LEADERS (14:23)**

- A. It is the specific job of some missionaries to help identify and equip emerging leaders. This is why the **Pattersons** were called to a seminary in the Slovak Republic, and why **Rutters** work in identifying and mentoring new missionaries to work in Europe.
- B. Nothing is so important in identifying the church’s leaders as intense prayer. Remember Samuel in the OT trying to identify which of Jesse’s sons was to be Israel’s king. No one even *thought* of David because, as God told them, “*Man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart.*” So those entrusted with safeguarding the future of young congregations need to be deeply prayerful and sensitive to God’s Spirit.

Finally they came home. **Vv.26-28...** They told all the stories we can read in these two chapters and many more. They shared names of new believers and elders. They rejoiced how amazed they were at the eager response of Gentiles to Christ—with no knowledge of the Old Testament or the promises of a Messiah. They told about

those church's first meetings together, and how new disciples had been filled with the Holy Spirit. And the believers there in Antioch told them how often they'd been prayed for, how eagerly they had waited for news.

#### IV. OUR MISSIONARIES RETURN TO ENCOURAGE US WITH REPORTS OF GOD'S GOSPEL WORK (14:26-28)

- A. Part of missionary work is reporting back to the churches that sent them. This is a cooperative work. No missionaries dare go out without churches to pray and help. And we grow in our faith when we hear the reports of doors opened for the gospel.
- B. The work of evangelism will not end till Jesus returns but there are times when missionaries finish a task, as Paul and Barnabas did. I wrote to Dave and Patsy Alfors to ask about that because I remember that early in their missionary career they worked among a group in Congo called the Water People. Here is what Dave told me:

*Our team worked in the Water People area for 15 years... There were 18 villages in this area and only one church at the village where we settled. We knew our work as missionaries was finished in this area when the Water People themselves were doing the church planting. ... When we left the Water People they were just starting to send out their own "missionaries" to reach other Water people farther down river outside of their county.* [email of 5/30/15]

- C. Not all missionaries return with glowing reports. Some come home kind of like Paul the morning after that stoning—battered and limping. Some do work that is deep in the support network of a mission—like computer support or funding from foundations. **But at the heart of all missionary endeavors is that somewhere, somehow, through those whom churches have "committed to the grace of God," doors are opening for the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Let's conclude this morning with one more video greeting, this from Heidi Ramer in Perth...